

## REMEMBERING THE SOMME

# Brothers in arms died

All the men of the Somme were, in a matter of speaking, brothers in arms. For many families, however, it had a more literal truth with the loss of two or more sons.

**STEVEN MOORE** tells of some of these tragedies

**B**ROTHERS Robert, Andrew, David and Herbert Hobbs were inseparable, enlisting together in the Ulster Division on its formation and serving together in the 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers.

On July 1, 1916, they left the trenches north of the River Ancre, advancing into a hail of German machinegun fire that rapidly increased as the division to their left were beaten back.

As the remnants of the 108th Brigade made its way back to its own lines, giving up their meagre and short lived gains, the survivors left behind the heaped bodies of their comrades.

Back home in Armagh, the telegram boys were rushed off their feet delivering their dreaded black-rimmed messages.

At Andrew's home in Union Street where his wife Elizabeth and widowed mother lived, the knock at the door brought tragic news - three of the brothers had been killed and the fourth lay wounded. Robert, Andrew and David Hobbs have no known graves, with their names inscribed on the Thiepval Memorial, just a short distance away from where they fell.

The loss of more than one son was, sadly, a common occurrence during the Great War.

The Angus brothers, from Bangor, died within weeks of one another. Blair, the youngest of the three, was killed on the first day of the Somme battle.

Robert, at 23, the middle child, died just over a week later, also on the Somme, while James, serving with a Canadian unit, was killed at Vimy Ridge in early September, 1916.

The Love family from Downpatrick sent all eight sons off to war. Three didn't return, including two killed on the Somme.

A fourth, Sergeant William Love, was severely wounded early in the war and was nursed at home in Scotch Street, Downpatrick, but died in May, 1919, and was buried in Down Cathedral New Cemetery.

Frank Skelton, who had been a prominent UVF member before the war, was sent home to Clones to die, having been severely wounded while serving with the 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers.

He passed away on June 8, 1916, and is buried at St Tighernach Church of Ireland in the border town. Three months later, his parents received word of the death of his brother, Private Gibson Fitzgerald Skelton, of the 10th Canadian infantry, who was killed on September 12 on the Somme.

John Orr, of Ballywhisken, Millisle, Co Down, had five sons, a brother and three half-brothers in the services, of which three were killed - his son Andrew serving with the Canadians, his brother Hugh, with the Highland Light Infantry and a half-brother Francis, with the Royal Irish Rifles.

Two of Belfast man Arthur Newell's three serving sons were already dead, one killed in July 1915 and the second in March of the following year, when he received word that his surviving boy had been wounded on the Somme. He recovered only to be killed in action in August, 1917.

The widowed Mrs Hamill, of Finlay Street, Ligoniel, Belfast, lost two sons, one of whom, 21-year-old Rifleman Samuel George Hamill, of the 13th Royal Irish Rifles, died on the Somme. A third son



**TRAGIC:** brothers Arthur and James Hollywood were both killed on July 1, 1916. Their bodies were never found

was wounded.

Brothers Joseph McCann, of the 10th Royal Irish Rifles, and William, 5th Seaforth Highlanders, from Ravenscroft Street in Belfast, died a month apart on July 1 and August 2, 1916, respectively.

The loss was felt as much across the officer class of the Army. Lieutenant Holt Montgomery Hewitt, of the 109th Machine

Gun Corps, was killed on July 1, 1916, and lies in Mill Road Cemetery, next to the Ulster Tower. He was 29 and had played half-back for Bangor and North of Ireland rugby clubs.

His younger brother, Second Lieutenant William Arthur Hewitt, 23, of the 9th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, died the same day and is commemorated on the nearby Thiepval Memorial.

On July 6 Lieutenant-Colonel Ricardo wrote to the family: "Your little lad Willie led his platoon over our parapet, and the last I saw of him was his happy smile as I wished him luck.

"They got across to the German trenches, in front of which they came under an appalling machine-gun fire. Your lad was hit, and Sergeant Lally, who is not in hospital wounded, was with him when he